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# ***MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES***

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## **Avenging the General Sherman: The 1871 Battle of Kang Hwa Do**

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## ***Acknowledgments and Sources***

The majority of information contained in this paper was derived from primary sources. In my effort to present a picture that gave both Korean and American perspectives, I used historical data from both countries, as well as knowledge based on interviews with experts from both countries. From the United States, I used official State Department cables from several individuals as well as translations of letters sent back and forth between U.S. and Korean officials at the time. These are contained, in their entirety, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*, a document containing all official dispatches of the State Department for that year. Other key sources from the American perspective included the official reports filed by the Navy and Marine officers who filled key positions on the naval task force during the time of the battle. These official reports can be found, in their entirety, in *Report of the Secretary of the Navy: 1871*, a document containing all official Navy and Marine Corps reports from actions and operations participated in during that year.

The personal letters of Captain McLane Tilton, USMC, the senior Marine in the battle and the commander of the Marine battalion, were also very important in providing key information for this paper. Admiral Seaton Schroeder, who was an Ensign at the time of the battle, wrote a book published in 1922, *A Half Century of Naval Service*, that provided interesting and valuable information for this paper. The photographs in this paper (with the exception of those that I took) came from two sources: the National

Archives at College Park, Maryland, and the Navy Historical Center at the Washington Navy Yard. Mr. Jack Green of the Navy Historical Center was very helpful in guiding me through the process of finding old and seldom requested maps, drawings and photos. Finally, interviews with two U.S. experts proved to be very important. Mr. Robert Collins, who is the Special Assistant to the J5, United States Forces Korea, was helpful in providing documents and perspectives on the battle. Lieutenant Colonel Mark Franklin, USA, a Northeast Asia Foreign Area Officer specializing in Korea, and a graduate of the Republic of Korea's Army Command and Staff College was also very helpful in providing information for this paper from the U.S. perspective.

Primary sources that gave a view of the battle from the Korean perspective were also very important in providing data used in this paper. Dr. Suh In-han, a research historian at the Institute for History Compilation of the Republic of Korea, provided two in-depth interviews that gave me information on Korean order of battle in 1871, political and military concerns at the time, and preparations for the defense of the island of Kang Hwa, that to my knowledge, have never before been published in the English language.

Professor Thomas Duvernay, an American who teaches at Kyongju University in Korea, has done a great deal of research on the battle analyzed in this paper, and provided many archival sources that were crucial to the research I did. Mr. Kwak No-jung, a city official on Kang Hwa island, gave me valuable insights as well as maps and pictures that proved very important when I walked the ground of the battlefield during December of 2000.

For the official Korean accounts of the battle, I turned to the *Kojong Silrok*, the national history compilation of the Republic of Korea. Some of these records are actually

available online, though most can only be accessed at the National Archives in Seoul, Korea.

Walking the ground of the battlefield proved to be vital in providing information used in this paper. The battlefield has been completely restored to its original state and all signs, placards and maps on the battlefield are posted in both English and Korean. Since the battlefield was restored and is now maintained by the government of the Republic of Korea, this proved to be very important in helping to give me the Korean perspective of the battle. The day I walked the ground of the battlefield, I was fortunate enough to be accompanied by Captain June Cho, USA, a Northeast Asia Foreign Area Officer who is fluent in the Korean language and was invaluable in helping me to cross the language barrier when discussing the battle with Koreans in Kang Hwa City, the museum near the battlefield, and the various sites located in and around the battlefield area.

The trip that I made to Korea was perhaps the single most important aspect of the research I conducted for this paper. That trip would not have been possible without the generous grant I received from the Marine Corps University Foundation. I owe a debt of gratitude to the Foundation, and to the Dean of Academics, Charles D. McKenna, along with the other professors at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, who not only encouraged me to pursue this endeavor when I first broached them with the subject, but helped point me in the right direction for achieving my goals.

Little has been written in English about the 1871 Battle of Kang Hwa Do, but secondary sources from that time period such as *Harpers Monthly*, as well as articles in *Leatherneck*, *Naval Proceedings*, and *the Marine Corps Gazette* provided interesting background knowledge as I was conducting research for this paper. Historical books and



other publications by both Korean and American authors also provided interesting background knowledge for the research I was conducting while writing this paper. All of these sources can be found in the bibliography.

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**Dedication:**

To my daughter Sara; through her veins runs the blood of both Korean and  
American Warriors.



## **AVENGING THE GENERAL SHERMAN: THE 1871 BATTLE OF KANG HWA DO**

In the Hall of Heroes at the Pentagon sits a small monument to 15 men who won the Medal of Honor in what is labeled the Korean Campaign of 1871. The names of six Marines and nine Navy personnel who fought in a short 18-hour war serve as one of the few reminders of an incident not even known to most American servicemen stationed in Korea. And yet, this battle was a pivotal moment in the historical relationship of the United States and what was then the Kingdom of Korea.

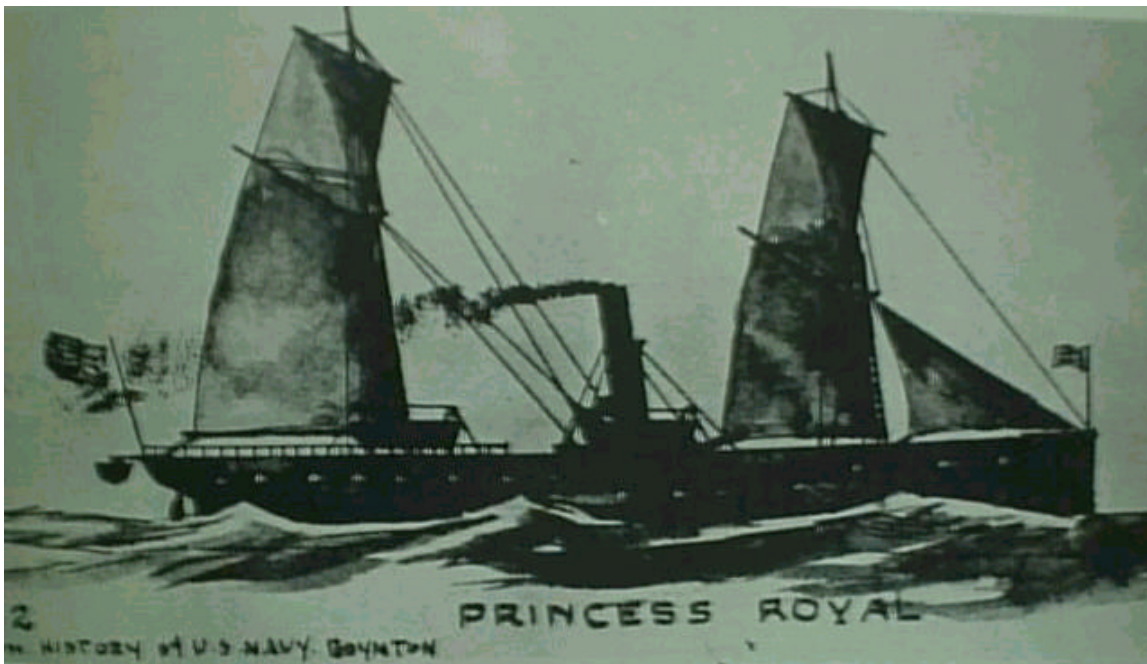
Before describing the battle that occurred on 10 and 11 June 1871, it is important to understand the reasons Koreans and Americans found themselves in conflict in the first place. Thus, it is key to understand the national security policy that motivated the United States into getting involved on the Korean peninsula, and the goals the Americans had once they decided to use force as a tool for enforcing foreign policy on the Korean peninsula.

### **Korea: Opening up to the West**

Korea had been an isolated civilization for most of its 4,000 year history going into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Much of this was self-imposed, as the Koreans were constantly invaded by foreigners throughout their history. In fact, China and Japan often fought and settled wars with each other on the Korean peninsula – at the expense of the Korean people. Because Koreans were geographically caught between two Asian powers, they were able to maintain their identity only by keeping their country (and their culture) closed to almost all outsiders – particularly westerners.

Things began to change in the 1860s. First, Korea's principal ally (and often overlord) China, was being opened up to the west a piece at a time, often against its will. The government of China was too weak to stop the inroads made on its landmass by the western powers. Another key element of change was the introduction of Christianity. By the early 1860s, several thousand Koreans had converted to Catholicism. Most of the missionaries entering Korea had to do so in secret. When discovered, they were often put to death, or detained in prison. The majority of these missionaries were French. Despite strong discouragement from the Korean government, by 1866 there were several thousand converts in Korea.<sup>1</sup>

The year 1866 was pivotal in Korean history. First, the Russians unsuccessfully attempted an expedition into Korea. This was particularly disconcerting to the government because Russia had recently gained land holdings in China and now had a border with Korea. The Koreans feared conquest was on the minds of the Russians.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the government in Korea, dominated by the Taewun-gun (Regent), began to become extremely displeased with the behavior of Catholic missionaries and their converts. Early in 1866, he decreed that they be punished or executed. The resulting anti-western demonstrations (exacerbated by the recent visit from the Russians) resulted in several thousand Korean Catholics being killed or driven from their homes. All of the priests were killed except for three who escaped to China and reported the fate of their comrades in Korea. The event caused great anger in the French government.<sup>3</sup>



**Official U.S. Navy drawing of the *General Sherman* prior to it's renaming.**

### **The Ill-Fated *General Sherman***

Meanwhile, some enterprising Americans decided that Korea would be an interesting place to attempt setting up trade. Their timing could not have been worse. The U.S. flagged merchant ship *General Sherman* visited Korea in July of 1866. She had previously been named the *Princess Royal*, and had been a Confederate blockade-runner during the Civil War. Following its capture before wars end, the ship was converted to a Union vessel, then after the war was converted to a merchant vessel. The small ship had a crew of approximately 21 men and was heavily armed. Upon entering the mouth of the Taedong River (which runs into Pyongyang), the ship's captain, Mr. Page, met with officials who told him he was not welcome. Despite being warned off, Page decided to sail up the river. The trip came to a sudden and violent end when the ship sailed too far up river, becoming caught in low water levels. Seeing a chance to put the mission to a complete and final ending, the Koreans lit several rafts on fire and floated them against



the sides of the ship. The crew, attempting to escape, was massacred. There were no survivors. Most were hacked to death.<sup>4</sup>

### **The French Expedition**

Later that year, the French decided to take action on what they considered to be an unlawful slaughter of missionaries. A three-ship expedition sent by Admiral Roze made a brief survey of the situation and returned to China where they reported the rumored fate of the Americans. The small expedition also made important surveys of the islands near the west coast of Korea, drawing maps of the area that would prove to be surprisingly accurate for later French and American expeditions. On 15 October 1866, a second French armada arrived in the waters just off the west coast of Korea.<sup>5</sup>

The French expedition consisted of seven combat navy ships and a landing force of 600 men, 400 of which were French Marines from the base at Yokohama. The announced object of the French expedition was a blockade of the Han river leading into Seoul.<sup>6</sup> Admiral Roze decided that the best way to do this would be to attack the small city of Kang Hwa, the largest city on the island of Kang Hwa (Kang Hwa Do means “River Flower Island” in Hangul, the written Korean language). The French took the small city with little difficulty, but did not anticipate the uproar it would cause among the populace of the island. Bands of irregulars harassed the French forces and kept them constantly on the defensive. Admiral Roze made his big mistake when he ordered forces to attack the fortification of Cho Dung-sa, approximately 10 miles south of the city of Kang Hwa. His forces ran into 800 elite Hwa-rang (warriors) there and were beaten back

with heavy casualties. The remaining forces fell back to Kang Hwa City in disarray, with the Korean warriors in hot pursuit.<sup>7</sup>

On the verge of complete defeat, and seeing his landing force in danger of being annihilated, Admiral Roze ordered them to re-embark the next day. First however, he ordered the city of Kang Hwa to be set ablaze and ravaged. The French decided to take the largest bell in the city, a huge bronze bell, as a trophy of war (Koreans are famous for their intricately designed bells, which have been a cultural tradition for over a thousand years). Unfortunately for the French, the Korean warriors again attacked, this time forcing the landing force to retreat so quickly back to their ships that they abandoned the large bell and left it rolling down a hill after them. The French were completely routed in the confrontation and the bell was later hung in the center of the city as a reminder of the failed invasion by the French foreigners. Thus ended the French chapter in the attempted pacification of the Korean Kingdom.<sup>8</sup>



**A monument warning all Koreans to fight foreign aggression. Many monuments similar to this were erected all over Korea in 1866 following the French defeat. This monument sits near Tokjin Fortress (Ft. Monocacy). Re-erected 1973.**

The French attack on Kang Hwa Do would have important ramifications for the American expedition that followed in 1871. Because several western powers had attempted attacking the peninsula on the west coast, and particularly Kang Hwa Do, it was determined that the forts defending the island needed to be beefed up and armed more heavily. In addition, the troop strength of both the ground and naval garrisons was increased significantly in anticipation of another attack by foreigners.<sup>9</sup> Finally, knowing that their firepower was significantly inferior to that of western powers, great care was taken in calculating fire zones, powder charges and placement of weaponry, in anticipation of further attacks on island defenses.<sup>10</sup> In the aftermath of the 1866

engagements, monuments were erected throughout the kingdom decreeing all citizens must fight attacks by foreigners.

### **The Bizarre Expedition of Ernest Oppert**

Small-scale and rather blundering attempts to open up Korea to western trade continued in 1868 when the German merchant Ernest Oppert devised a bizarre plan to force the Koreans into opening up to westerners. With a crew made up primarily of Malays and Chinese, he chartered the merchant ship *China*. His plan was to secretly enter Korea, dig up the tomb of the Taewon-gun's (Regent) father, and then demand that Korea open up to western trade before the relics from the tomb would be returned.<sup>11</sup>

Along with a few Korean Catholics as guides, Oppert and his small raiding party entered Asan Bay and sailed up the nearby river to Kaya Dong, where the Taewon-gun's father was buried. Burial mounds for Korean royalty are huge, and this particular burial mound proved to be far too large for a few crewman to lay waste to in a short amount of time (time was of the essence, as being discovered would mean almost certain death). The project was abandoned when it proved to be simply too big for the small number of people undertaking it. This is when the island of Kang Hwa once again became the focal point for attempted interference by foreigners. After leaving Asan Bay, Oppert sailed north to Kang Hwa Do. Upon arrival, he informed Korean authorities that he had profaned the grave of the Taewon-gun's father in retaliation for the murder of the French missionaries (mentioned earlier). He then demanded that Korea open up to western trade. The Koreans of course reacted angrily, as he was sent on his way by an angry mob in a clash that resulted in the wounding of two of the Malays in Oppert's crew.<sup>12</sup> Oppert was later reprimanded by German authorities in Shanghai, but by then it was too late and the

damage was done. Once again, westerners had offended the Koreans not only politically and violently, but culturally as well. Once again, Kang Hwa Do had been the site where much of the action had occurred. By this time, the obvious inference is that, based on events, the Taewon-gun, who was the leading power broker in the royal family at the time, had developed a strong bias against outside influence from the west. It is also likely that, given the actions occurring during the 1860s time frame, he also had developed a strong distrust for westerners.

### **U.S. Attempts to Determine the Fate of the *General Sherman***

By 1867, the United States still had received no official word on the fate of the *General Sherman*. Rumors from Chinese officials in Peking were that the ship had been wrecked on the Korean coast (a very reasonable assumption given the shallow, rocky waters and the extreme tides in the region), while the report from the failed French expedition was that the ship had been sunk near Pyongyang – though it remains unclear definitively where the French heard this.

In 1867, the U.S. Navy dispatched Commander Robert W. Shufeldt to investigate what had happened to the *General Sherman*. He was ordered to Korean waters, once again the west coast, to determine the fate of the lost merchant ship. Commander Shufeldt ran into bad weather on his expedition and was forced to turn back early, but what little contact he had with Korean authorities proved to be extremely unproductive. The Koreans were uncooperative and did not confirm anything he did not already know. Unable to accomplish his mission and fearing the bad weather, Commander Shufeldt turned his ship, the *Wachusett*, back to China.<sup>13</sup> Shufeldt would later successfully

negotiate the first treaty between Korea and a western power, but that was many years later and will be described in detail near the end of this essay.

The second attempt to determine the fate of the *General Sherman* occurred in April 1868, when Commander John C. Feiberger was dispatched with his ship, the *Shenandoah*. This time, Commander Feiberger was able to get beyond the bad tides and the weather, but again ran into a stone wall when dealing with the Koreans. In Korean culture, as in most East Asian cultures, face and protocol are considered extremely important. Apparently, the Koreans did not consider an individual of Feiberger's rank and status (the Captain of one Navy ship) important enough to deal with in any substantive way. Feiberger was told by the mid-level officials he met that, "Koreans did not deal with anybody who did not come under direct instructions from the Sovereign of the United States."<sup>14</sup>

### **Forming the Expedition of 1871**

As events related above prove, the United States had been unable to successfully obtain an answer from the Koreans relating to the fate of the *General Sherman*. This was particularly disconcerting to the United States government given the fate of other western excursions in Korea that the Americans knew of. By 1871, the State Department had determined that a "large-scale" expedition should set sail, under a State Department official, for Korea.<sup>15</sup>

What the United States hoped for was to secure a treaty with Korea similar to the one negotiated with Japan by Commodore Perry in 1853. Also of key concern was the safety of merchant seaman who would be traveling in Korean waters. Finally, a definitive account of what happened to the *General Sherman* was to be sought. These were truly

lofty goals given the history of Korean dealings with westerners during the 1860s. The American State Department was well aware of this. Minister Frederick Low described Korea as “More of a sealed book than Japan was before Commodore Perry’s visit.”<sup>16</sup>



**Frederick Low, shown with Edward Drew (State Dept.) and Chinese officials.**

Frederick Low, the Minister to China, was put in charge of a five-ship naval expedition in China in May of 1871. The combatant command of the expedition was to be under Admiral John Rodgers, but all decisions regarding dealings with the Koreans, up to and including those involving violence, were to be made by Minister Low. Frederick Low was an accomplished politician who had formerly been governor of California. Both he and Admiral Rodgers felt that securing the safety of merchant seamen traveling in Korean waters was paramount. They both also believed a treaty similar to the one secured with Japan was unlikely. Because of events that had occurred throughout the 1860s, violence was not ruled out as a method to be used in dealing with the Koreans. Nevertheless, it was not to be the first option.<sup>17</sup>



**The USS Colorado, flagship of the Asiatic Squadron.**

The expedition was formed from five ships, the *Colorado* (flagship), *Alaska*, *Benicia*, *Monocacy*, and *Palos*. The *Monocacy* and *Palos* were both paddle-wheel steamers capable of navigating the tricky tides and rocky waters of the river Han and the tributaries into it near Kang Hwa Do. All five ships were heavily armed. Also onboard the ships was a contingent of Marines, numbering 109 officers and men. The ships in the expedition were designated the “Asiatic Squadron,” and Frederick Low reported aboard the flagship *Colorado* on 13 May 1871.<sup>18</sup>



### Order of Battle: US Asiatic Squadron

Admiral Rodgers (Squadron Commander) -----Minister Low

USS Colorado \

USS Benicia \

USS Alaska \

USS Monocacy \

USS Palos \ Attached Marines

Note: Marines were attached to the *Colorado*, *Alaska*, and *Benicia*.

Note: Minister Low was in charge of the overall expedition, Admiral Rodgers was in overall combatant command.

The five ship expedition sailed from Nagasaki, Japan on 16 May and first anchored off of the Korean coast on 17 May, moving slowly around the Korean peninsula toward the island of Kang Hwa. Fog kept the small task force from moving too quickly, but by 23 May the five ships had anchored near Inchon, close to Wolmi island.<sup>19</sup>

It was determined that soundings would be taken of the waters in and around “Roze Roads” (the French name for the area now widely known as Kang Hwa Do and surrounding islands, near the coastal industrial city of Inchon). The exploration and soundings were conducted because of the reputation for treacherous waters that the west coast of Korea had. In case of future operations or merchant ship visits, these operations would prove to be very important for the safety of American merchant seamen.



**The Village Chief of Wolmi Do, called “Roze Island” by the Americans.**

**Wolmi Do would become well known in 1950 as the first site of the famous Inchon Landing, where 3/5 would conduct the initial assault. Wolmi Do sits directly across From Inchon, and in 1950 was connected to the mainland by a causeway.**

### **Initial Contact with the Koreans**

The main exploration of the small islands around Inchon and south of Kang Hwa Do was conducted by Commander Blake (commanding the *Palos*). Most of the islands were

very small and sparsely populated. On Wolmi Do, an apparent armed band of approximately 200 citizens under a battle banner appeared in a threatening manner (probably led by local Yong-ban, Korean nobles), brandishing sharpened wooden lances. When it became obvious that the Navy ship meant no harm to the Koreans, they became much more friendly. The day following the brandishing of what must have appeared to be very primitive weaponry, the natives on Wolmi Do actually welcomed the sailors ashore on the island, with the Village Chief allowing himself to be photographed.<sup>20</sup> The attitude of the Koreans at Wolmi Do must have been extremely misleading to the Americans. They took the initial attitude of violent defense to be early shyness toward westerners, and reported back to Minister Low that the situation would likely be the same when encountering military forces and government officials farther to the north on Kang Hwa Do.

On the afternoon of 29 May, the expedition moved its ships still farther north but was again forced to anchor before desired because of thick fog. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, with the fog having cleared, the small fleet moved north again, anchoring just south of Kang Hwa Do. It was here that the *Colorado* was approached by a junk with individuals onboard indicating they desired communications with the expedition. The Koreans carried with them a letter that stated the Korean government had learned the small fleet was American (from an earlier letter handed out to villagers by crewmen of the *Palos*), and announced that three envoys appointed by the Sovereign had been appointed to confer with them. The individuals who carried the letter were of inferior government grade and were merely messengers for the envoys who would follow later. The messengers were assured that the Americans had only peaceful intentions and that they

had no intention of attacking unless first attacked. The envoys took this message back to the Korean government officials after exchanging formalities with the Americans.<sup>21</sup>



**Korean Officials onboard the *Colorado*. Note traditional Korean garb and hat.**

On May 31<sup>st</sup>, the three Korean officials acting as envoys who had been announced by the messengers the previous day, appeared in a junk next to the Colorado and were allowed onboard. These three individuals announced that they were officials of the third rank and failed to exhibit any real authority from the Korean government or the governor of Kang Hwa Do. Understanding the East Asian proclivity for protocol, Minister Low declined to see them (because of their rank), instead referring them to his assistants from

the State Department, Mr. Drew and Mr. Cowles. They were informed that the expedition would be sending surveying vessels the next day up the river that ran between Kang Hwa and the mainland and eventually fed into the Han river that ran through Seoul. They were also informed that Minister Low had important business with the Korean government and desired to meet with officials of the first rank, and also desired to make treaties – a treaty in their estimation meaning trade. The Korean officials were cordial, and explained that they had no authority to grant any wishes because of their rank. They also stated that while the King desired friendly relations, he did not desire to make treaties. They did not make a statement regarding the surveying mission that was to take place the next day. The envoys were given a short tour of the *Colorado*, and left the ship on cordial terms with the State Department officials and ships crew. Minister Low did not have a good feeling about this meeting with the Korean envoys, remarking in his official dispatch that he placed “little confidence in oriental professions of friendliness,” and that he would make “every effort to avoid trouble unless forced on him in a way that cannot be escaped without dishonor.”<sup>22</sup> Based on his analysis of events that had occurred, Minister Low decided to go ahead with the surveying expedition scheduled to take place the next day.

### **The Korean Attack on the United States Surveying Party**

On June 1<sup>st</sup>, the surveying expedition sailed north, bound for the Yam Ha river, which the Americans called the Salee river, a name given to it by the French because of its brackish waters. Their instructions from Admiral Rodgers, as approved by Minister Low, were “To proceed cautiously, avoiding all menace, through the passage before referred to, taking careful soundings, and making such scientific observations as would enable a

correct chart of the channel to be made.’<sup>23</sup> Commander Blake, the leader of the surveying expedition was further instructed, “in case a hostile attack were made, either upon his men or vessels, to reply by force, and destroy if possible, the places and the people from whom the attack came.”<sup>24</sup> Blake was also further instructed to proceed quietly in his mission and go as far north along Kang Hwa Do as possible, turning east and heading up the Han river towards Seoul if possible, but not to enter Seoul. Once these orders were carried out, Blake was to return with his surveying expedition back to the main anchorage of the Asiatic Squadron just south of Kang Hwa Do, and to report his findings.<sup>25</sup>

As discussed earlier, Commander H.C. Blake was in charge of the expedition sent up the Yam Ha river. The force dispatched consisted of the *Monocacy*, Commander E.P. McCrea; *Palos*, Lieutenant C.H. Rockwell; *Alaska’s* steam launch, Lieutenant C.M. Chester; *Colorado’s* steam cutter, Lieutenant G.M Totten; and *Benicia’s* steam launch, Master Schroeder. Blake was onboard the *Palos*. The *Monocacy* and the *Palos* were the only ships able to navigate the shallow and rocky waters on the Yam Ha river, thus the other three ships from the Asiatic Squadron stayed behind, anchored just south of Kang Hwa Do awaiting the findings of the small surveying expedition sent upriver.<sup>26</sup>

The ships and steam launches weighed anchor at noon on 1 June, and proceeded up the river with the four steam launches ahead in line abreast, followed by the *Palos*, with the *Monocacy* bring up the rear. The ships ran into problems almost immediately. Because the *Monocacy* and the *Palos* had the tide with them, they could not go slow enough to allow the launches time for accurate angles or soundings. For this reason, it was almost impossible for the surveying parties to construct truly accurate charts of the river.<sup>27</sup>

The expedition went quite peacefully for the initial part of the mission. Koreans could be seen on the shore near fishing villages and small hamlets as the ships and launches made their way cautiously up the river. Blake's party soon reached a point in the river (still at the lower end of Kang Hwa Do), where several forts appeared. These forts were manned, and Korean troops could be seen darting in and out of positions. From a parapet high above the connected forts flew a huge banner, which in Hangul (Korean Characters) carried the symbol of the Commanding General. As the party reached a sharp bend in the river, another small fort could be seen on the east bank (all of the other forts were on the west bank of the river). Some of the artillery noted was of the 32 pounder variety, though the majority was of much smaller caliber. From what the Americans onboard the ships and launches could see, most of the weaponry arrayed in and near the forts consisted of gingals, a small, 16<sup>th</sup> century vintage piece smaller than an actual cannon, but too big for one man to carry. Normally, the gingal would be mounted on a stick and held up by two men. A third man would then light the end of the gingal, igniting the powder, and the weapon would fire. These weapons were clearly inferior to the weaponry being used at the time by United States forces.<sup>28</sup>

As the Americans approached the pronounced bend in the river, a single shot was fired, apparently from a pistol or musket near the large standard of the Korean Commanding General. This was probably a signal, planned for in advance, that the Koreans were to fire on the Americans. Instantly, from the forts and from masked batteries that had been concealed all along the river, heavy fire was rained down upon the ships and boats of the Americans. The ships and launches immediately returned the fire. The damage inflicted on the forts and firing positions of the Koreans was apparent

immediately. Many of the Koreans deserted their positions and took refuge in the ravines that were prevalent along the hillsides. Because the current of the river was so powerful, it was impossible to stop the vessels in the positions from which they were first fired upon. With the ships going at full speed, they soon sailed out of sight of the guns and around the bend. Once rounding the bend, Blake turned his party around and once again faced the forts. From there, a steady fire was maintained on the forts and smaller positions until it became obvious that most of the Koreans had been driven out.<sup>29</sup>

By this time the *Monocacy* had struck rocks and was leaking badly. In addition, the launches were running dangerously low on ammunition. One of the launches, the *Benicia's* steam launch, commanded by Master Seaton Schroeder, had a particularly harrowing experience. Shortly after nearing the forts, the launch became disabled by the landline, fouling the propeller. During this time, the expedition swept on far ahead. After clearing the line and starting ahead, one of the crew remarked that the artillery batteries on shore seemed to "be saluting." As the launch rejoined the other vessels, it too came under heavy fire from the Korean positions. When the launch got closer to the shore, Schroeder sighted a Korean dressed in the obvious garb of one of the commanders. The young naval officer coolly picked off the officer with his carbine and the troops around the Korean leader dashed for the ravines. He then swung the launch around again and fired the launch's 12 pounder on the main fort, getting a direct hit near the Commanding General's position. The problems with the landline fixed, and having sufficiently contributed to the combat mission of the other ships and boats in the expedition, the launch was able to rejoin the expedition as it sailed back to the main anchorage of the Asiatic Squadron.<sup>30</sup>



With one ship leaking badly and ammunition running low, Blake decided it was time to rejoin the rest of the Asiatic Squadron to the south. He maintained a steady fire on the Korean positions for a few more minutes and then withdrew his surveying party and headed back down the river. The only casualties of the mission were John Somerdyke, an ordinary seaman, who received a gunshot wound in the left shoulder (not serious), and James Cochran, also an ordinary seaman, who lost two fingers from the recoil of the howitzer he was firing. Both men were on the *Alaska* steam launch. None of the vessels or launches received any damage from the fire of the forts. The damage from the rocks to the *Monocacy* was insufficient to keep her from limping back along with the rest of the surveying party to rejoin the Asiatic Squadron to the south.<sup>31</sup> The surveying party probably was not badly damaged in the engagement because of the superiority in firepower that the Americans had over the Korean positions. A bit of luck probably also prevailed, as many of the sailors reported seeing the “plop-plop” of shells all around their launches during the engagement. The Americans would find out later that the guns the Koreans had were very limited in their targeting capability. The largest artillery could not be moved, so was fired from fixed positions, which made adjusting fires next to impossible. The same was true for the smaller pieces, which were often simply lashed to logs by rope or attached to earthwork positions where they too had difficulty adjusting fires.<sup>32</sup> The bottom line was that the Koreans probably got much worse than they gave on the afternoon of 1 June. Nevertheless, the nature of the positions they had occupied and the number of men they had in their garrisons made it a relatively easy process to rebuild positions and to strengthen the walls of the forts in anticipation of the next attack that was likely to come from the Americans.

### **The Aftermath of the June 1<sup>st</sup> Engagement**

When the ships from the surveying expedition returned to the Asiatic Squadron anchorage with word of the “unprovoked” attack they had received from the Koreans, both Minister Low and Admiral Rodgers felt that further action needed to be taken. It was obvious that the Koreans had planned for and laid an ambush for the Americans as they sailed up the river. In his dispatch of 2 June, Minister Low stated that, “The events of yesterday convince me that the government of Corea is determined to resist all innovations and intercourse with all the power at its command, without regard to nationality...” He further stated that, “If the squadron retires now, the effect upon the minds of the Coreans, and, I fear, upon the Chinese also, will be injurious, if not disastrous to our future prospects in both countries.”<sup>33</sup> Clearly, Low felt that this should not be the end of the issue. The fact that two previous smaller expeditions had been unsuccessful in generating a treaty or gaining any knowledge on what happened to the *General Sherman* was also likely disconcerting and added to the frustration felt by both Minister Low and Admiral Rodgers.

For their part, the Koreans were completely unapologetic, and questioned United States motives. In a note that was left for the Americans and brought onboard the *Colorado*, the Koreans claimed that the destruction of the *General Sherman* was brought on itself because of hostile action taken, and as for the wreck near Kang Hwa, “who is to be blamed?”<sup>34</sup> The note further inquired, “Will you wish to take possession of our land and people, or will you wish to consult upon and carry out friendly relations?”<sup>35</sup> The Koreans still did not see of a need for a treaty. They had been living 4,000 years they

said, without a treaty with the Americans, and of course they couldn't see why they should not just continue to live as they always had.<sup>36</sup>

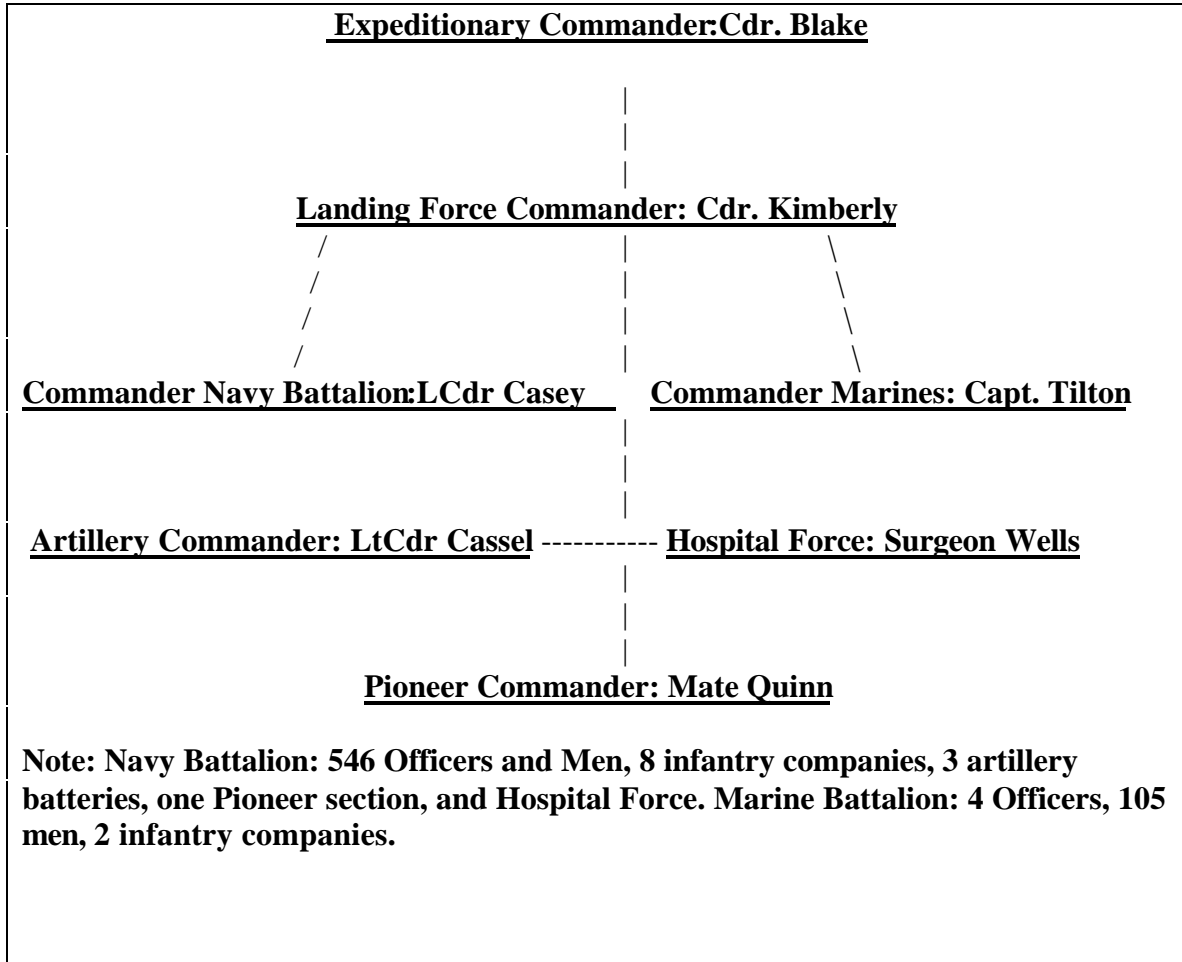
In reply to the note, Edward Drew, Frederick Low's assistant, sent through a messenger another note. In it he assured the Koreans that, "We desire peace and friendly feelings exist between our country and all others."<sup>37</sup> On 6 June, a note from the governor of Kang Hwa was brought onboard the *Colorado*. In it, the governor stated that "...it was the ascent [of the river] to the sea-gate of your vessels the other day that brought on the engagement between us." The note further stated, "I send some worthless articles as a trifling assistance to your table..." [Note – With the foregoing were brought three bullocks, fifty chickens, and one thousand eggs, which were declined].<sup>38</sup> Clearly, Minister Low and Admiral Rodgers felt that the "offering" sent to the Asiatic Fleet by the governor of Kang Hwa along with an explanation was not enough of an apology to warrant not striking back at the Koreans for what they felt was an unwarranted attack on the surveying expedition sent forward under Commander Blake. From the notes sent to them by the Koreans, it seemed clear that the governor of Kang Hwa Do felt the attack was justified – as was the attack on the *General Sherman* five years earlier that continued to weigh heavily on the minds of the Americans.

Minister Low and Admiral Rodgers agreed that punishment should be rendered against the Koreans. Because of the small size of the American force, Admiral Rodgers felt the most practical form of attack would be against the forts that had fired on the surveying expedition, along with any surrounding forts which also may have been protecting the positions near the river that had fired upon United States naval ships.

Admiral Rodgers had many concerns regarding the sending back of a combat force to punish the Koreans for actions taken against the Americans. First of all, the Koreans of course needed to be given time to render an apology to the Americans. It was felt that if a proper apology and explanation for actions taken was rendered by high level Korean authorities, no violent actions needed to be taken.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, the prevalent spring tides which were active in and around Kang Hwa Do were a great concern. During the spring-summer tide season, the water rises from 30 to 35 feet with each flood tide. Because of this, the velocity of the stream at the point which the attack would need to be made would render the management of vessels extremely difficult<sup>40</sup> (Ironically, this would be a key concern for the U.S. Navy again some 79 years later, when a specific time period had to be chosen to land at nearby Inchon, because of extremely treacherous tides). The tides would not be favorable to offensive operations until 10 June. Finally, a ten day delay would be important because it would give time for training of the landing force, a task which would be a challenge because, with the exception of the Marines, most of the sailors had little experience in the weaponry and tactics of landing operations.<sup>41</sup>

The landing force was particularly fortunate in that the ships had been given a large store of the new Navy version of the 1867 Remington Rifle. Captain McLane Tilton, who would lead the Marine battalion in the landing force, had served as the Marine Corps member of a Navy Board which made exhaustive studies towards adoption of a new breech-loader for Navy use. As such, he was literally one of the most qualified individuals in the Naval service to train the Navy seamen of the landing force in the manual of arms, loading, unloading and firing of what would prove to be one of the most effective infantry weapons of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>42</sup>

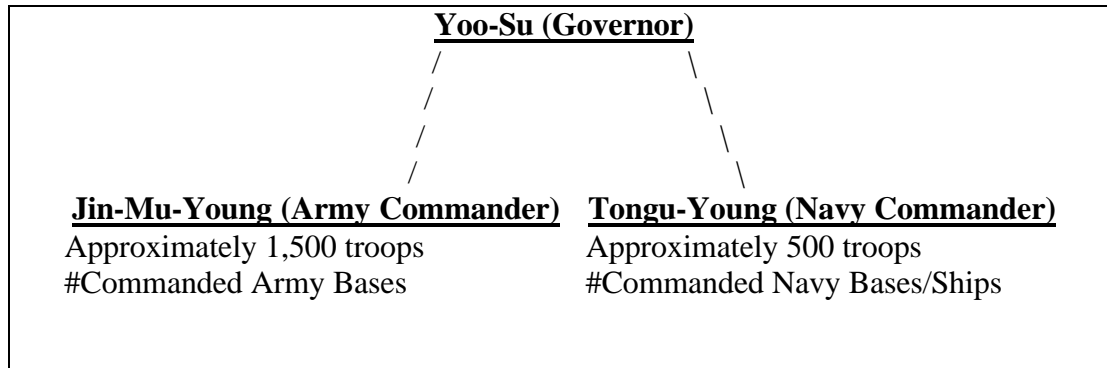
## Expeditionary Force Order of Battle



The expeditionary force sent up the river to attack the Korean forts would consist of the *Monocacy*, commanded by Commander E.P. McCrea, the *Palos*, commanded by Lieutenant C. Rockwell, four steam launches under Lieutenant Commander H.F. Pickering, and a number of smaller boats which would be towed behind the ships. The landing force would be embarked on the boats being towed behind the ships. Lieutenant Commander Silas Casey commanded the infantry battalion, Lieutenant Commander D.R. Cassel commanded the artillery, and Captain McLane Tilton, USMC, commanded the Marine battalion. Commander Blake, who had commanded the earlier surveying

expedition, would command the expeditionary force. He was to remain afloat, embarked aboard the *Palos*.<sup>43</sup> In typical 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S. Navy fashion, in full dress uniform, the Admiral ordered all of the companies of infantry, the field batteries of artillery, and the pioneers, sappers and miners and hospital corps to be assembled and pass in review.<sup>44</sup>

### **Korean Order of Battle: Kang Hwa Do**



Facing the Americans upriver, the Koreans had assembled a formidable force. Because Kang Hwa Do had been the focus of so much interference from foreigners in the 1860s, the garrisons were heavily fortified. In addition, the ground troops, under the command of General Oh Choe-yon, were well trained, many having experienced combat against the French. Korea was a country with a very disjointed chain of command within the government going down to the military. Though the warriors on Kang Hwa were probably among the best in Korea, in western terms they were roughly the equivalent of state militia, with the ground and naval commanders both answering directly to the governor of Kang Hwa, who in turn took his orders from the Taewon-gun (Regent). While Korean records are not exact, the Korean force on Kang Hwa is estimated to have numbered roughly around 2,000 men, approximately 1,500 ground forces and about 500 naval personnel.<sup>45</sup>



**The *Palos* towing part of the landing force into the attack on the Korean forts.**

### **The Landing Force Moves In**

At 1000 on June 10<sup>th</sup>, the *Monocacy* weighed anchor and, accompanied by two steam launches, began steaming up the river. At 1030, with all the boats having taken their proper places for towing, the *Palos* weighed anchor and proceeded up the river with the boats in tow. Two steam launches followed to the *Palos*' rear in case of accident.<sup>46</sup>

Commander Blake's orders were to approach the forts that had fired on them previously, shelling them and driving out all inhabitants if possible. Once this was accomplished, the landing force was to disembark, with the armed launches supporting and covering the force for debarkation. Difficulties were anticipated from the natural obstacles in the river such as rocks, shoal water and furious currents. Thus, Commander Blake was to use his own discretion regarding the exact details of where to disembark the landing force. The object of the mission was to hold and destroy the forts that had previously fired on U.S. vessels, but only long enough to demonstrate the American ability to punish the Koreans for actions taken against U.S. forces. The force was to return within 24 hours (tides permitting), or such reasonable time as the Commander saw fit. The slim chance of a

treaty was still seen, and if one was offered, Blake was to accept it as long as it fell within the terms described by Admiral Rodgers - under the direction of Minister Low.<sup>47</sup>

As the small expeditionary force approached Kang Hwa Do, a Korean junk appeared, waving a white flag. Blake ordered one of the steam launches to approach the vessel and meet with the individuals onboard. The Korean junk carried on it a message from a high level Korean official which was translated by Mr. Drew, the State Department representative accompanying the expedition. The letter was similar to the others received by the Americans, and because it still contained no apology, Blake made the decision to continue up the river.<sup>48</sup>

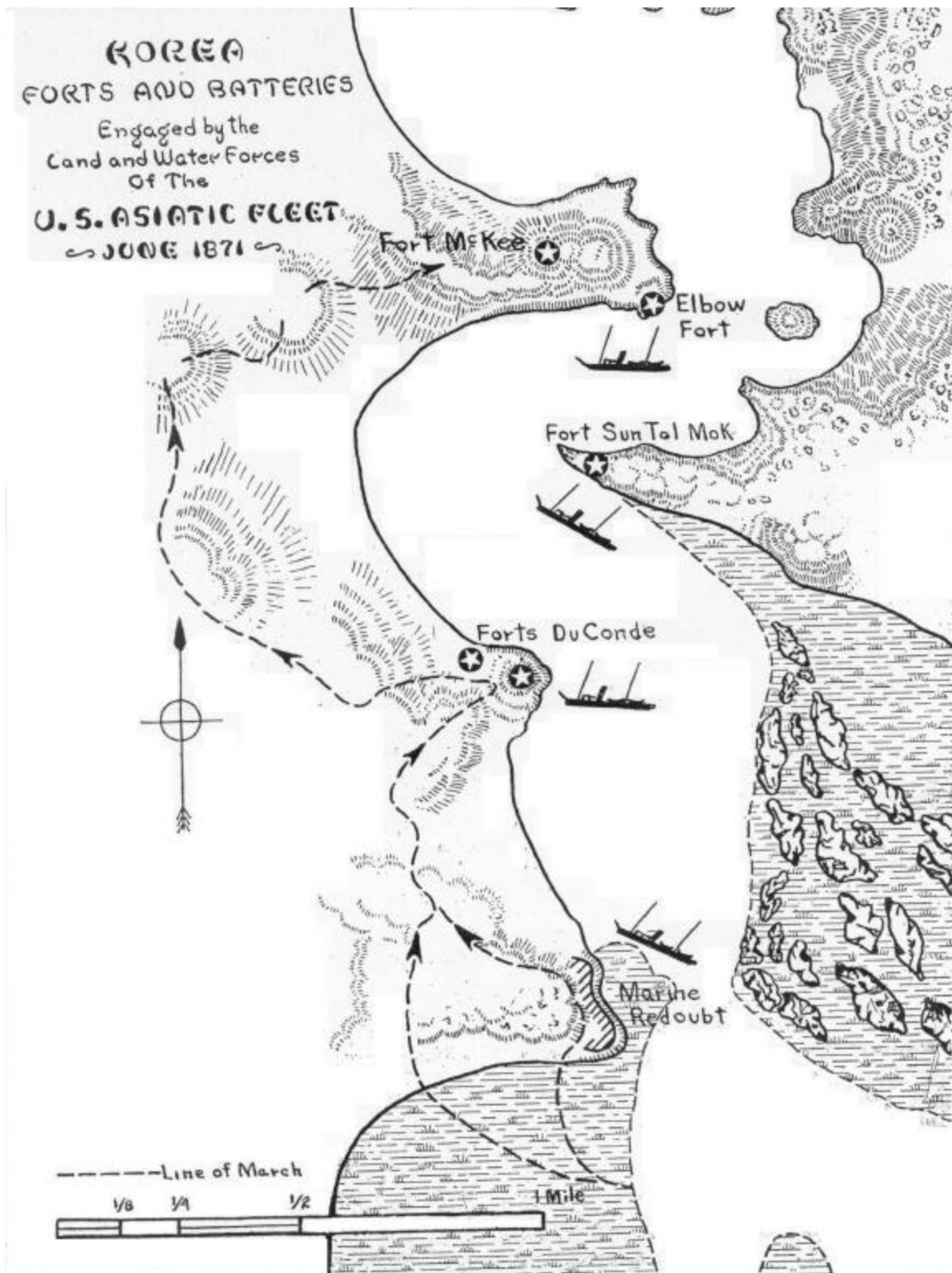
At approximately 1200, Commander McRea, commanding the *Monocacy*, approached the first fort, called Choji Fortress by the Koreans, and later renamed the Marine Redoubt by the Americans. Passing the Marine Redoubt, which was also close to a smaller set of positions, the *Monocacy* was fired on by the artillery from the shoreline. None of the enemy shells did any damage, many becoming caught in the hammock settings of the ship or cutting some of the standing rigging far above the heads of the sailors. The *Monocacy* was brought to anchor about 550 yards from the forts and commenced firing. Much of the wall face on the forts was destroyed and the guns of the Koreans were silenced.<sup>49</sup>

At 1330, the *Palos*, with 19 boats in tow carrying the landing force, approached the first positions. The landing party departed for the beach at 1343. They approached in two lines of boats. The launches and boats made up one line (two boat lengths apart), while another line to its immediate right composed the second line.<sup>50</sup> Upon landing, the artillery, consisting of seven pieces, ran into trouble almost immediately. It was landed



with only the greatest of difficulty, because as soon as the pieces were loaded off the boats, they sank up to their axle trees in thick mud, and only could be moved very slowly, with extreme difficulty. It took about 80 men nearly the whole afternoon to get the artillery out of the mud.<sup>51</sup> It was decided that the Marine battalion under Captain McLane Tilton would go forward as skirmishers in advance of the bogged down artillery, as the rest of the landing force remained near the artillery on the beach for force protection. Tilton's Marines were chosen for this job "on account of their steadiness and discipline," and were also the best trained troops for the job at hand.<sup>52</sup>

After disembarking, the Marine battalion formed a reinforced line of skirmishers across the muddy beach (79 years later at Inchon, similar mud flats would be encountered by the Marines who landed – such mud flats are common to the central west coast of Korea). The line moved along a tongue of land jutting out into the river, through small fields of grain, towards the first fort. As the Marines approached the fort, they came under some small arms fire. After the Marines returned the fire, the occupants of the fort, who had already come under heavy fire from the *Monocacy* earlier, fled through the brush and fields, firing a few shots back at the Marines as they ran. The fort was secured, and all of the weapons, food supply and ammunition was destroyed or dumped into the river. The Marines then advanced through the area, sweeping through more grain fields and a small village, but encountering no opposition.<sup>53</sup> By then, the artillery batteries had been successfully pulled from the mud flats and the main body of the landing force rejoined the Marines. Tilton was ordered to again push forward with his battalion, and to conduct a reconnaissance-in-force for engagements that would be conducted the next day.



The line of march for the landing force. The area identified on this map as “Forts Du Conde” was later renamed Fort Monocacy by the landing force. The map also depicts the route traveled by the ships providing naval gunfire support.



**Members of the landing force pose inside the Marine Redoubt. Note small Korean artillery pieces and muskets in the photo.**

As the main body of the landing force waited northwest of where the Marines had taken and destroyed the first fortification, Tilton's battalion moved forward as skirmishers-in-force once again. The second fort in the line of forts that sat along the shoreline was then approached. This fort, known as Dokjin Fortress by the Koreans, would later be renamed Fort Monocacy by the Americans. By this time, the Marines were about half a mile ahead of the main body. Captain Tilton described the fort as "a square work of hewn granite foundation, with a split rock, mud, and mortar rampart, crenulated on each on each face, with a front of about 30 paces."<sup>54</sup> A messenger was

dispatched to headquarters to tell them that the road was clear and passable for artillery. Tilton then posted pickets on the flanks of his position, which was just behind a rice field, and a Dahlgren 12-pounder was also positioned (the only such piece the Marine battalion had), so they were able to command the junction of the only two approaches. The Marine position now commanded the road to their position and the approaches to the fort. Because the main body planned to rejoin them in the morning, the Marines bivouacked in their advance position below the second fort for the night.<sup>55</sup>

That night, sometime around midnight, the Marines were suddenly awakened by screams and howls of Koreans, intermixed with some small arms fire. Marines on the scene noted that the Koreans looked like “white ghosts in the night.”<sup>56</sup> This is likely a reference to the traditional Korean garb the warriors were wearing. The garb consisted of several layers of white cloth used as body armor to protect against arrows and minor sword wounds. Throughout the centuries, Koreans have traditionally crept near the camps of their enemies at night and made great pains to scare them before whatever battle was to occur the next morning. The Marines were neither frightened nor amused by having their sleep interrupted. A few artillery shells were lobbed in the direction of the Koreans attempting to harass the Marines, and they quickly dispersed.<sup>57</sup>

At 0400 the next morning, the Navy and Marine encampments sounded reveille. As the Americans began to move about in both encampments, uniforms were once again donned, blanket rolls rolled up, and small fires lit to heat their portable tea and coffee. The Marines stood their ground as individuals from one of the Navy companies returned to the first fort and completed destruction of all remaining ammunition and supplies. The fort was burned to the ground.<sup>58</sup>

At 0700, the artillery was ordered to advance in order to support the Marine attack into the second fortification, Fort Monocacy (Dokjin Fortress).



**Marines on the ramparts of Fort Monocacy immediately following its capture.**

The artillery was formed up with two pieces in front, three in the center and two to the rear. Kang Hwa Do is an extremely hilly island, and the roads at the time were very narrow. In addition, the sailors had nothing to pull the large artillery pieces except manpower. The weather was also extremely hot and humid. Because of these factors, progress was slow but steady. Sailors from the infantry companies assisted in helping to tow the heavy but very important artillery pieces. The Marines were then once again ordered to advance, this time on the second fort, and with the now land-based artillery support provided by the Navy.<sup>59</sup>

As the main body reached the Marines, they once again threw out a line of skirmishers-in-force. The Marines stretched out in a line across the hills behind the fort and attacked it from the rear face. They were able to enter the fortification without opposition, its inhabitants apparently having abandoned it during the night. The artillery that had been called forward thus did not yet need to be used. After entering the fort, the

Marines dismantled the battlements by throwing into the river the 60 or so breech loading brass cannon – all of which had been abandoned loaded. They then tore down the ramparts on the front and much of the right face of the fortification. Captain Tilton described the ramparts as consisting of “...a pierced wall of chipped granite, with a filling of earth in the interstices and coated over with mortar, giving it the appearance of being more solid than it really was.”<sup>60</sup>

After leaving the second set of fortifications captured, the Marines progressed about another half mile through steep hills and deep ravines. At this point they once again encountered opposition from the Korean warriors. From the left, the Marines began to receive small arms fire. Tilton cautiously wheeled his skirmishers and upon reaching a summit, saw the enemy on a parallel ridge. There they could be seen blazing away at the Americans with their gingals and matchlocks, (as described by Captain Tilton) “their black heads popping up and down the while from the grass, but only one bullet spent struck us, without injury.”<sup>61</sup> Lieutenant Commander Cassel’s artillery was called in for support, successfully firing rounds that scattered the force attempting to attack the Marines. In addition, two companies of sailors were brought forward under Lieutenant McKee to support the Marine left flank.<sup>62</sup>

The Marine skirmishers, supported by artillery and two companies of sailors, now advanced to the next set of hills. It was on this set of hills that the Koreans once more chose to attack the landing force. This time they attacked with great fury, attempting to charge the high positions the landing force now tenuously occupied, and firing hundreds of small arms, again using as weapons the gingals and flintlocks which had imposed so little damage since the landing had occurred. Though the number of warriors attacking

was estimated by the Americans at the time to be several thousand, it was probably closer to several hundred warriors who attacked, being repulsed by the Marine skirmishers and Navy infantry companies again and again. With the aid of artillery and maintaining a steady stream of small arms fire with their Remington Rifles, the Americans were able to successfully defend all of their positions. Seeing that their attacks would not loose the Americans from their positions, the Koreans fell back, retreating to the third set of fortifications along the river (later named Fort McKee by the Americans and Kwangsung fortress by the Koreans) and other positions to await the attack by the landing force.<sup>63</sup>

### **The Main Engagement**

At a point approximately a third of a mile from the third fortification (which the Americans initially called “The Citadel” because of its great height), the Marines and accompanying forces halted for a rest. Many of the men were close to heat exhaustion because of the terrain and weather conditions. Following a short rest, the Marines, continuing to act as skirmishers, cautiously began taking up positions along a crest approximately 150 yards from the west walls of the fortification. The main body then came up and formed close behind the Marines. With the entire landing force now nearly into position, the Americans decided it was time to test the firing capability of the Koreans inside the fort. Along a path running immediately before the fort ran a long set of banners, obviously planted there by the Koreans. Much to the dismay of the occupants of the fort, several Marines bravely ran through a tremendous hail of fire, pulling down approximately 15 of the banners and greatly angering the Koreans.<sup>64</sup>

The entire infantry force that would attack the main fort, numbering about 350 men in all, was now on a ridge approximately 150 yards from the wall of the fortification.



**The interior of Fort McKee (Kwang Sung Fortress) just after the battle.**

The force pushed forward to the next ridge, and were now about 120 yards from the fortification. From there, a furious fire commenced from both sides. The firing continued for a few minutes, and from inside the fortifications, the Koreans could be heard singing their war songs defiantly as the Americans prepared to charge the walls.<sup>65</sup>

Having massed on a ravine directly facing the rear defenses of the fort, the landing force prepared to charge. They were supported by artillery fire from a nearby hillside from Douglass Cassel's batteries.<sup>66</sup> In addition, immediately before the charge was made, the fortifications had once again been bombarded by the guns of the *Monocacy*, which had sailed up the river in anticipation of the naval gunfire support it would need to provide.<sup>67</sup> The signal given to stop the naval gunfire bombardments, the force was now



ready to charge. The Marines were on the extreme right of the line and the Naval infantry companies on the left. When the order was given, the whole line rose up from the ravine amid a terrible fire of gingals and with a yell, rushed for the fortress.

The first man over the top was Lieutenant McKee, who gallantly led his company into the fort. He was killed by both spear and bullet as he fought at the head of his men. By this time, the rest of the two battalions were charging into the main defenses. As the Koreans ran out of ammunition, they continued fighting with swords and rocks, even throwing dust up into the faces of the Marines and Sailors. The battle waged fiercely until a Marine sniper picked off the Commanding General of the Kang Hwa garrison, Oh Choe-yon. With that, the Koreans began to fall into disorder and retreat. As the Koreans ran for the river, Cassel's artillery caught them in the flank with cannister. Many warriors could be heard screaming as their cloth body armor caught on fire. The smell of burning flesh prevailed over the battlefield as the Americans continued to fight the faltering forces of the fortress. Captain Tilton passed to the right of the fort with several of his men, and caught the Koreans retreating along the crest of a hill which joined the main fortification to a smaller fortified position. Using their Remington Rifles, the Marines cut down the retreating Koreans before they could escape. A few Koreans actually made it to the river, but were there captured. By 1245, the entire fort was taken. The Marines quickly cleared out two smaller fortifications nearby that they named Elbow Fort and Hydrographer Fort. This brought the final total of forts being destroyed to five.<sup>68</sup>

The total number of Korean dead estimated by the Americans on the scene was 243.<sup>69</sup> The number of dead estimated by Korean historians is somewhere around 350.<sup>70</sup> While the battle had raged, Corporal Brown and Private Purvis, USMC, had pulled down the

huge yellow cotton standard of the Korean Commanding General. The flag was later to be brought back to the Asiatic Squadron and now sits in the Naval Museum at the United States Naval Academy.<sup>71</sup>

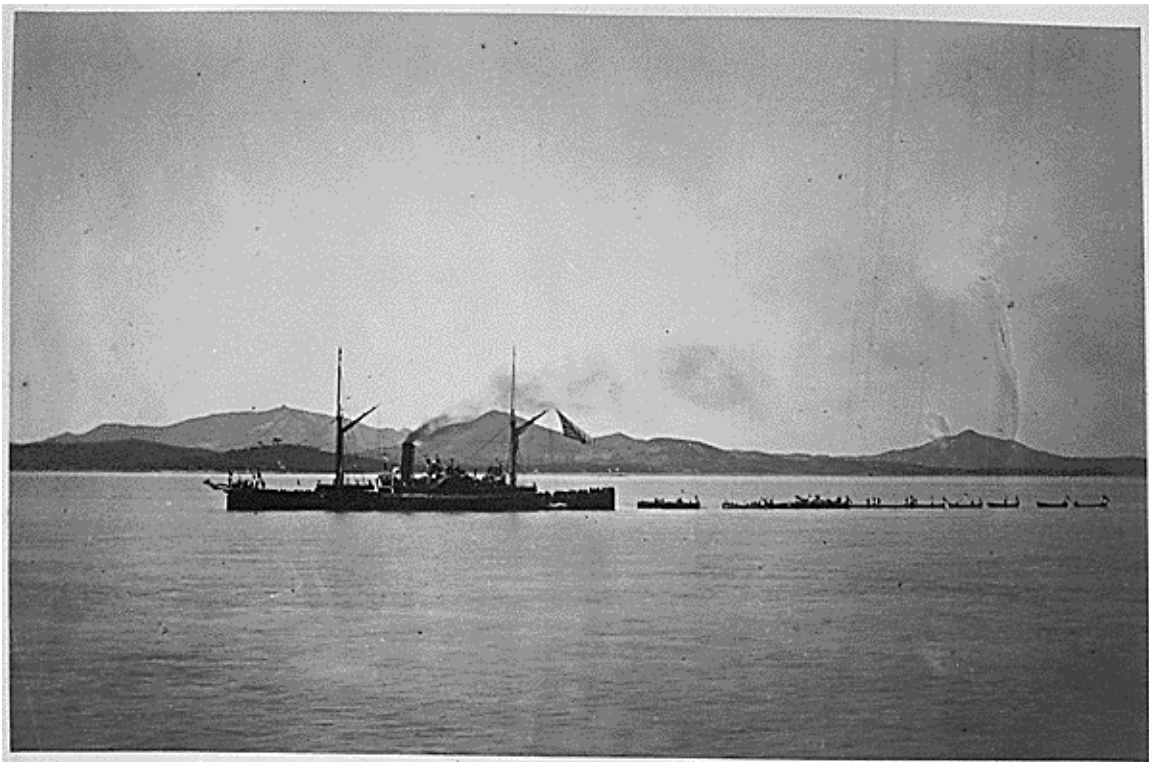


**Korean prisoners captured following the battle at Fort McKee.**

### **The Results of the Battle**

The victorious Americans brought the Korean prisoners with them as they re-embarked onboard the ships to sail back to the Asiatic Squadron. The Marines, who had been the first in the fight, were given the honor of being last ashore. They remained to cover the landing force as it departed the battle areas for the ships, and to destroy what equipment was left in the last forts they had occupied. The entire landing force remained ashore for a second night, camping out within the confines of the main fortress. In all, the landing force captured and spiked 481 cannon, hundreds of flintlocks and gingals, and 50 flags. The flags were taken back to the ships as was the custom during the 19<sup>th</sup> century for a unit which is victorious in battle. The entire force was re-embarked

onboard the *Palos* and *Monocacy* within an hour of sunrise on the 12<sup>th</sup>. The total casualties for the Americans were, three killed and nine wounded.<sup>72</sup> Fifteen members of the force, nine sailors and six Marines, would later receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for the role they played in the 16 hour campaign.<sup>73</sup>



**The *Monocacy* towing boats back to the Asiatic Squadron following the battle.**

During the campaign, the *Palos* struck rocks in the river and started to keel over. It was only with the aforementioned highly rising tide that she was able to get off, after considerable pumping from the ships crew. Both the *Monocacy* and *Palos* received damage from the shoals and rocks in the river that would later have to be repaired at dockside in Shanghai. There was no other major damage to the ships, launches or boats in the expedition. On the way back to the Asiatic Squadron, it was determined that the final fortress where an engagement was fought (Kwang Sung Fortress) would be named Fort McKee after the brave comrade who had perished there.<sup>74</sup>



**Pvt. Hugh Purvis and Cpl. Charles Brown pose with the captured flag of the Korean Commanding General. Purvis and Brown were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for their actions on Kang Hwa Do, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1871.**

### **Waiting for a Reply from the Koreans**

Following the end of the battle, the Americans continued to attempt contact with high level Korean officials. Mr. Drew sent a dispatch through messenger to the governor of Kang Hwa Do, telling him that they had taken Korean prisoners, and that the men were being given medical treatment and food, offering to return them to the government of Korea as long as they agreed to not fight against the Americans again.<sup>75</sup> He received the reply that, "If you shall come to join battle, then with battle we will meet you, and there's an end (of the discussion)."<sup>76</sup> On the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, nine days after the battle's conclusion, the governor of Kang Hwa Do sent another long dispatch to Mr. Drew in which he told him there would be no visits to the King, no correspondence from the King, and no welcoming committee on Kang Hwa or any other part of Korea. In addition, no treaty was to be concluded with the Americans. Finally, the prisoners when received back at Kang Hwa, were to be "punished accordingly."<sup>77</sup> The prisoners, upon their return, were probably put to death. On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, Frederick Low sent the following short telegram to the State Department; "Recent demonstrations produced no effect upon negotiations. Nothing can be effected short of the capital. Force insufficient to go there without great risk. If peaceful means fail, shall withdraw and wait instructions."<sup>78</sup>

On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, one final dispatch was sent to the governor of Kang Hwa in which it was made clear the United States would not tolerate violent action taken against its merchant seamen or Navy ships, but was a peaceful nation and desired eventual peaceful relations with the government of Korea.<sup>79</sup> Having seen that neither peaceful nor violent means would push the Koreans into signing a treaty with Minister Low or even allow him to meet with high level officials, the Squadron withdrew, and sailed back to China.

## **Medal of Honor Awardees: 1871 Korean Campaign**

### **United States Navy:**

John Andrews  
Frederick H. Franklin  
Patrick Henry Grace  
Cyrus Hayden  
William F. Lukes  
Alexander McKenzie  
James F. Merton  
Samuel F. Rogers  
William Troy

### **United States Marine Corps:**

Charles Brown  
John Coleman  
James Dougherty  
Michael McNamara  
Michael Owens  
Hugh Purvis

## **Conclusions**

From a tactical standpoint, the battle of Kang Hwa Do was very successful. Fighting an enemy that outnumbered them considerably, the American landing force was able to successfully accomplish all of the combat goals for the operation. The attack was a well staged landing and infantry assault, supported by Naval gunfire and artillery that had been brought ashore. It was a textbook 19<sup>th</sup> century small-scale amphibious assault.

The superior firepower of the American landing force was undoubtedly the deciding factor in all of the engagements fought during the 16-hour campaign. The flintlocks and gingals of the Koreans were no match for the Remington Rifles carried by the Marines and others in the landing force. Always the meticulous Marine Officer, McLane Tilton

afterward noted in his report to the Secretary of the Navy that the ammunition for the new rifles that was packed in paper boxes misfired at least 25% of the time, while the cartridges in wooden boxes was nearly perfect.<sup>80</sup> Tilton of course was looking out for the safety of those infantrymen who would carry the rifle into battle on future expeditions. The artillery used by the Koreans also proved to be no match for the guns on the ships, or the field artillery batteries brought ashore. The Americans could maneuver their artillery much easier, and the shots fired by the ships often were able to clear out positions on the shoreline, while the shots fired by the forts on the ships inflicted almost no damage.

The fact that the Koreans had at least 240 killed, numerous others wounded, and still more captured, just in one of the three engagements, while the Americans suffered only three killed and seven wounded during the entire campaign, is also a tribute to the superior firepower and tactics of the American landing force. Nevertheless, the bravery of the Korean warriors was quite notable. Captain Tilton stated in his report that, “Their bearing was courageous in the extreme.”<sup>81</sup> Minister Low reported to the Secretary of State that, “Giving no quarter, and expecting none, the Koreans fought until the last defender had fallen.”<sup>82</sup>

The overall strategic goals of the expedition were not accomplished. The attack on the *General Sherman* (Which the Koreans had finally admitted to in one of their dispatches noted earlier in this work) was certainly avenged in the eyes of the Americans, as was the attack on the surveying expedition of June 1<sup>st</sup>. This was sounded off briefly in the American press of the time, but received little attention, as the United States was testing its Naval might in Asian locations throughout the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>83</sup> The Koreans refused to deal with the Americans at the time, and no treaty was concluded. In

fact, no substantive talks of any kind were concluded between Minister Low and Korean officials.

The United States did not give up on trying to establish relations with the government of Korea. In 1879, Commodore Shufeldt (who had earlier tried to negotiate with the Koreans as a Commander), dispatched aboard the *Ticonderoga*, once again tried to negotiate with the Koreans, this time through the Japanese, who had recently pushed the Koreans into opening up some of their ports to trade with Tokyo. This mission failed as well, but Commodore Shufeldt was not a man to give up easily. In 1882, Shufeldt again returned to Korea, this time onboard the corvette *Swatara*. A treaty was formally concluded between the United States and the government of Korea. Thus, in 1882, the United States became the first western nation to conclude a treaty and establish formal diplomatic relations with Korea.<sup>84</sup>

Did the campaign of 1871 have any effect on the United States being the first western nation to establish formal ties with Korea? It is not clear. At the time (1871), the Korean government saw no need to deal with the United States and was not intimidated by the U.S. armed forces, despite the fact that the landing force won such a clear victory. To the Koreans, it was an overall strategic victory for their side. In fact, at the restored battle site of Kwang Sung fortress (Fort McKee), the placard at the site states that the “Korean warriors fought bravely to the death before driving the Americans out.”<sup>85</sup> While it is not clear how the Koreans see the complete destruction of five of their forts and the slaughter of several hundred of their warriors as “driving out the Americans,” it is true that the landing force was too small to win any kind of large-scale victories over Korean forces on the mainland, and the ships of the expedition too few to forcefully open up any



Korean ports. Thus it appears that the intimidation that the United States used in attempting to force Korea to open up in 1871 was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, it may have been a factor in helping the Koreans to make a decision to deal first with the United States (among western powers). The power exhibited by Naval forces in 1871 may have been enough to influence the Koreans in wanting a powerful western partner now that the Japanese were busy trying to forcefully make many inroads into the Hermit Kingdom. Historians disagree and we shall never know for sure.

The battle of 1871 can legitimately be called the “First Korean War.” Marines landing on the beaches at Kang Hwa Do had no idea that 79 years later, their great-grandsons would make a much larger landing just a few miles south, at Inchon. This time, the Americans came as an ally, fighting against communist aggression, most of them having no idea that many years before, their brothers-in-arms had fought a short, 16 hour campaign that was to be the first combat American servicemen would see on the Korean Peninsula.

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> William Elliot Griffis, *Corea: The Hermit Kingdom* (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1902) 369-376.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Suh In-han, Research Historian at the Institute for Military History Compilation, Seoul Korea. Interview conducted by the author, 23 December, 2000, in Seoul Korea.

<sup>3</sup> Griffis, 377-378.

<sup>4</sup> Kojong Silrok, National History Compilation of the Republic of Korea, available at URL: [www2.nhcc.go.kr/cgi-bin/xlogin?dbid=/kchong/web/kchong](http://www2.nhcc.go.kr/cgi-bin/xlogin?dbid=/kchong/web/kchong)

<sup>5</sup> A. Wigfall Green, *The Epic of Korea*, (Washington DC: Public Affairs Press, 1950) 25-28.

<sup>6</sup> Griffis, 381.

<sup>7</sup> R. McM. Thompkins, "Glory of the River," *Leatherneck*, November 1955, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Thompkins, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Suh interview.

<sup>10</sup> Mr. Robert Collins, Special Assistant to United States Forces Korea J5. Interview conducted in Seoul Korea, 26 December 2000, by the author.

<sup>11</sup> Han Woo-keun, *The History of Korea*, (Seoul Korea: Eul-Yoo Publishing Co., 1970), 366.

<sup>12</sup> Kwak No-jung, City official, the city of Kang Hwa, Korea. Interview conducted at Kang Hwa Do, Republic of Korea, by the author, 26 December 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Jack Bauer, "The Korean Expedition of 1871," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol. 74 no. 540 (February 1948): 197.

<sup>14</sup> Bauer, 197.

<sup>15</sup> Official State Department Dispatch, No. 69, Onboard the USS Colorado, 13 May 1871. Mr Low to Mr. Fish, US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>16</sup> Official State Department Dispatch, No. 69.

<sup>17</sup> Glenn Howell, "Our Brief Clash with Korea," *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol. 61, No. 393 (November 1935): 1628.

<sup>18</sup> Official State Department Dispatch, No. 69.

<sup>19</sup> Report of Rear Admiral John Rodgers, No. 38, onboard the USS Colorado, Boissee Anchorage, Salee River, Corea, June 3, 1871.

<sup>20</sup> Report of Mr. John P. Cowles Jr., accompanying Commander Blake aboard the USS Palos, Roze Roads Corea, May 29 1871, US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>21</sup> Report of Rear Admiral Rodgers, No. 38.

<sup>22</sup> Official State Department Dispatch, No. 70, Onboard the USS Colorado, 31 May, 1871, Mr. Low to

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Mr. Fish, US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>23</sup> Official State Department Disptach, No. 71, Onboard the USS Colorado, 2 June, 1871, Mr. Low to Mr. Fish, US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>24</sup> Official State Department Dispatch, No. 71.

<sup>25</sup> Official State Department Dispatch, No. 71.

<sup>26</sup> Report of Rear Admiral Rodgers, No. 38.

<sup>27</sup> Report of Commander H.C. Blake, onboard the USS Alaska, Boissee Anchorage, 2 June, 1871.

<sup>28</sup> Report of Commander Blake, 2 June 1871.

<sup>29</sup> Report of Commander Blake, 2 June 1871.

<sup>30</sup> Seaton Schroeder, *A Half Century of Naval Service*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), 28-31.

<sup>31</sup> Report of Commander Blake, 2 June 1871.

<sup>32</sup> McLane Tilton, Personal Letter No. 14, Onboard USS Colorado, 21 June 1871.

<sup>33</sup> Official State Department Dispatch, No. 71.

<sup>34</sup> Translation of paper found attached to a pole on Guerriere Island, 3 June 1871, and brought onboard the Colorado, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>35</sup> Translation of paper found attached to a pole on Guerriere Island, 3 June 1871.

<sup>36</sup> McLane Tilton, Personal Letter No. 10, Onboard USS Colorado, 4 June 1871.

<sup>37</sup> No. 2, Reply to a communication found on Guerriere Island, on Saturday morning, June 3, 1871 written by Edward B. Drew, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>38</sup> Translation of dispatch brought onboard *Colorado* from Kang-Hoa high official, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>39</sup> Report of Rear Admiral John Rodgers, No. 43, onboard the USS Colorado, Chefoo China, 5 July, 1871.

<sup>40</sup> Report of Rear Admiral John Rodgers, No. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Report of Rear Admiral John Rodgers, No. 38.

<sup>42</sup> C.F. Runyan, "Capt. McLane Tilton and the Korean Incident of 1871," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (March 1958): 43.

<sup>43</sup> General Order, written by LCDR W. Scott Schley, Adjutant General, aboard the USS Benicia, 8 June, 1871.

<sup>44</sup> C.F. Runyan, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Dr. Suh interview.

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- <sup>46</sup> Report of Commander H.C. Blake, Onboard the USS *Alaska*, Isle Boisee, 17 June 1871.
- <sup>47</sup> Orders to Commander Blake, Given by Rear Admiral John Rodgers onboard the USS *Colorado*, Isle Boisee anchorage, Corea, 9 June 1871.
- <sup>48</sup> Report of Commander Blake, 17 June 1871.
- <sup>49</sup> Report of Commander E.P. McRea, Onboard the USS *Monocacy*, Boisee Island anchorage, 14 June, 1871.
- <sup>50</sup> Report of Commander Blake, 17 June 1871.
- <sup>51</sup> Report of Lieutenant Commander Douglass Cassel, onboard the USS *Alaska*, Off Isle Boisee, 13 June 1871.
- <sup>52</sup> Report of Commander L.A. Kimberly, Onboard USS *Benicia*, Boisee anchorage, 15 June, 1871.
- <sup>53</sup> Report of Captain McLane Tilton, Commanding United States Marines, onboard USS *Colorado*, at anchor off Isle Boisee, Corea, 16 June 1871.
- <sup>54</sup> Report of Captain Tilton, 16 June 1871.
- <sup>55</sup> Report of Captain Tilton, 16 June 1871.
- <sup>56</sup> Report of Captain Tilton, 16 June 1871.
- <sup>57</sup> Report of Commander Cassel, 15 June 1871.
- <sup>58</sup> Report of Commander Cassel, 15 June 1871.
- <sup>59</sup> Report of Commander Cassel, 15 June 1871.
- <sup>60</sup> Report of Captain Tilton, 16 June 1871.
- <sup>61</sup> Report of Captain Tilton, 16 June 1871.
- <sup>62</sup> Report of Lieutenant Commander W. Scott Schley, Acting Adjutant General of Expedition, onboard USS *Benicia*, Isle Boisee, Corea, 14 June 1871.
- <sup>63</sup> Report of Lieutenant Commander Silas Casey, onboard USS *Colorado*, off Boisee Island, Corea, 16 June 1871.
- <sup>64</sup> Report of Captain Tilton, 16 June 1871.
- <sup>65</sup> Report of Captain Tilton, 16 June 1871.
- <sup>66</sup> Report of Lieutenant Commander Casey, 16 June 1871.
- <sup>67</sup> Report of Commander E.P. McCrea, 14 June 1871.
- <sup>68</sup> Report of Commander Kimberly, 15 June 1871.
- <sup>69</sup> Report of Commander Kimberly, 15 June 1871.

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<sup>70</sup> Suh In-han, *History of the French and American Invasions*, (Seoul Korea: The Institute for Military History Compilation, 1989), 69-78.

<sup>71</sup> The author visited the United States Naval Academy, where the standard remains on display.

<sup>72</sup> Report of Commander Kimberly, 15 June 1871.

<sup>73</sup> The names of those who won the Medal of Honor can be found at the “Hall of Heroes” in the Pentagon.

<sup>74</sup> Report of Rear Admiral Rodger, No. 43, 5 July 1871.

<sup>75</sup> Mr. Drew to Cheng, Guardian of Kang Hoa prefecture, ex-officio general and governor, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>76</sup> Translation of a dispatch received 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1871, on Guerrire Island, by hand of two messengers from the magistrate of Fu-Ping Prefecture, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>77</sup> Translation of a dispatch from the prefect of Foo Ping to Mr. Drew; received June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1871, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>78</sup> Telegram to Secretary of State, Washington, Corea, June 22, 1871, Frederick Low. *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>79</sup> Edward B. Drew, acting Secretary to legation, to Li, guardian general of Foo-Ping prefecture, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871*.

<sup>80</sup> Report of Captain Tilton, 16 June 1871.

<sup>81</sup> Report of Captain Tilton, 16 June 1871.

<sup>82</sup> Official State Department Dispatch, No. 71.

<sup>83</sup> For a good example of U.S. press reports on the battle, see:  
William Elliot Griffis, “Our Navy in Asiatic Waters,” *Harpers Monthly*, (New York: August 1898) 738-769. Available online at “Making of America,” from Cornell University:  
<http://library5.library.cornell.edu/moa/>

<sup>84</sup> Griffis, *Korea: The Hermit Kingdom*, 427-435.

<sup>85</sup> The author visited Kwang Sung fortress during December of 2000, when the words on the placard were noted.

\*All reports filed by Navy and Marine Corps officers found in the endnotes may be found in “Report of the Secretary of the Navy,” a compilation of all reports filed to the Secretary of the Navy during the year 1871, found at the Navy Historical Center, Washington DC.

**Appendix A:**  
**Sources for Photos and Illustrations**

## Appendix A

### Sources for Photos and Illustrations

- Page 4: "The General Sherman." Official US Navy picture. Control number unknown.
- Page 7: "Monument to fight foreign aggression." Photo taken by author at Kang Hwa Do, 26 December, 2000.
- Page 11: "Minister Low with Edward Drew." National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-37.
- Page 12: "The USS Colorado." National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-32
- Page 13: "Order of Battle: US Asiatic Squadron." Mr Low to Mr Fish. Official State Department Dispatch No. 69. *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1871.*
- Page 14: "Village Chief of Wolmi Do." National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-07.
- Page 16: "Korean Officials onboard the USS Colorado." National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-08.
- Page 25: "American Expeditionary Force Order of Battle." W. Scott Schley. Lieutenant Commander, USN. Adjutant General. General order, approved by Rear Admiral John Rodgers, Commanding United States Asiatic Squadron. *Report of the Secretary of the Navy: 1871.*
- Page 26: "Korean Order of Battle: Kang Hwa Do." Dr. Suh In-han. Research Historian At the Institute for Military History Compilation, Seoul Korea. Interview Conducted by the Author, 23 December 2000, Seoul Korea.
- Page 27: "USS Palos towing part of the landing force into battle." National Archives And Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-30.
- Page 30: "Map of engagements and line of march: June 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> 1871." Map courtesy of Marine Corps Gazette, January, 1948. Artist unknown.
- Page 31: "Members of the landing force inside the Marine Redoubt." National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-14.
- Page 33: "Marines on the ramparts of Fort Monocacy." National Archives and Records

Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-20.

Page 36: "The interior of Ft. McKee just after the battle." National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-24.

Page 38: "Korean prisoners captured following the battle." National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-36

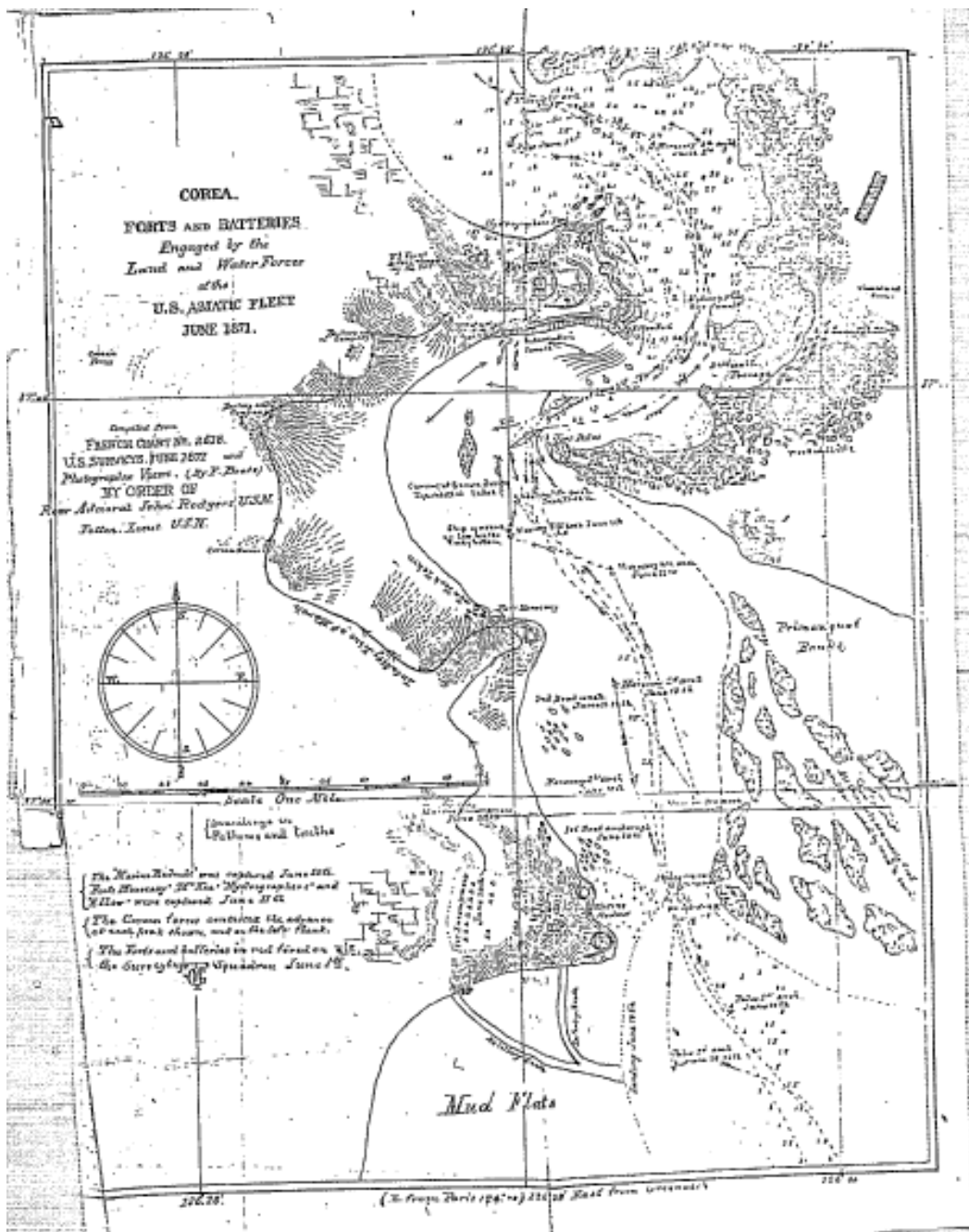
Page 39: "The Monocacy towing boats back to the Asiatic Squadron." National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-31.

Page 40: "Pvt. Purvis and Cpl. Brown pose with captured Korean flag." National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-46.

Page 42: "Medal of Honor Awardees." Names taken from The Hall of Heroes, under "1871 Korean Expedition." The Pentagon, Arlington Virginia.



**Appendix B:**  
**Ancillary Maps, Photos and Illustrations**



Copy of original map drawn by US Marines following the Battle of Kang Hwa Do. Drawn by order of Admiral Rodgers, 1871. From National Archives Microfilm, Roll 89/256. Map provided Courtesy of Thomas Duvernay, Professor at Kyongju University Korea.



Exterior view of the Marine Redoubt (Choji Fortress). National Archives  
And Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-13



Korean probable military camp near Marine Redoubt. National Archives  
And Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-16



Interior of Fort McKee immediately after capture showing the makeshift Headquarters of the Korean Commander. National Archives And Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-23



View of the “Elbow Fort” taken immediately after its capture by the Marines.  
National Archives  
And Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-27

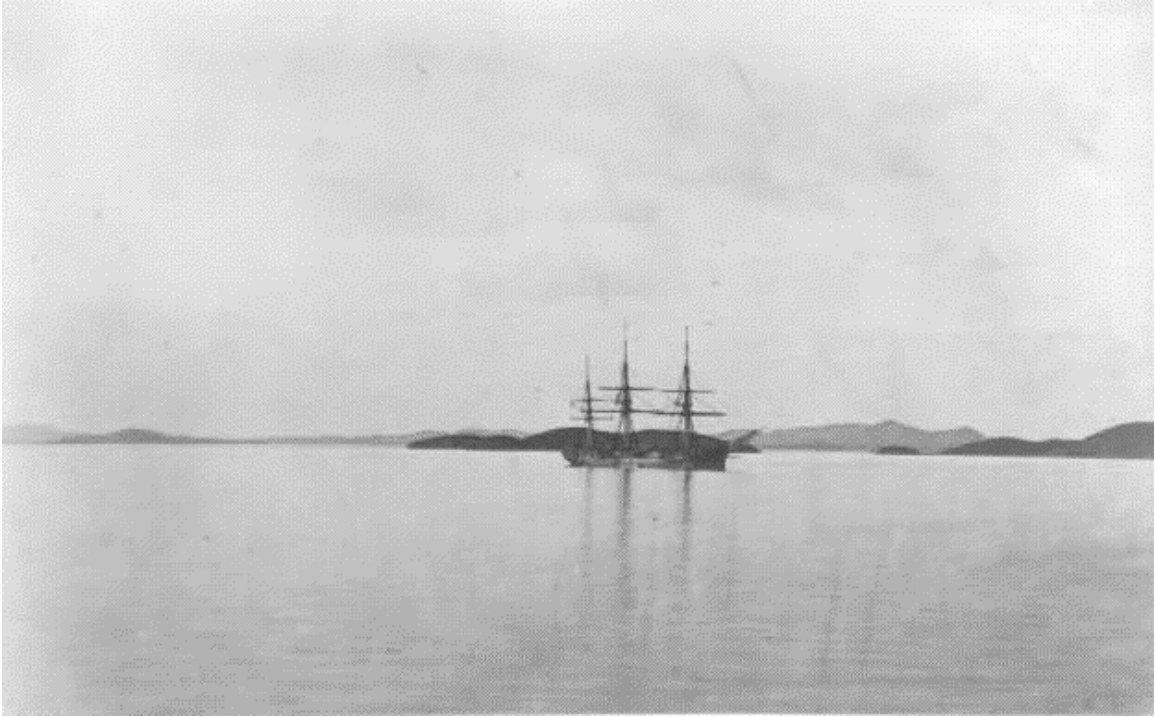


View of the “Elbow Fort” today. Picture taken by the author, 26 December 2000.

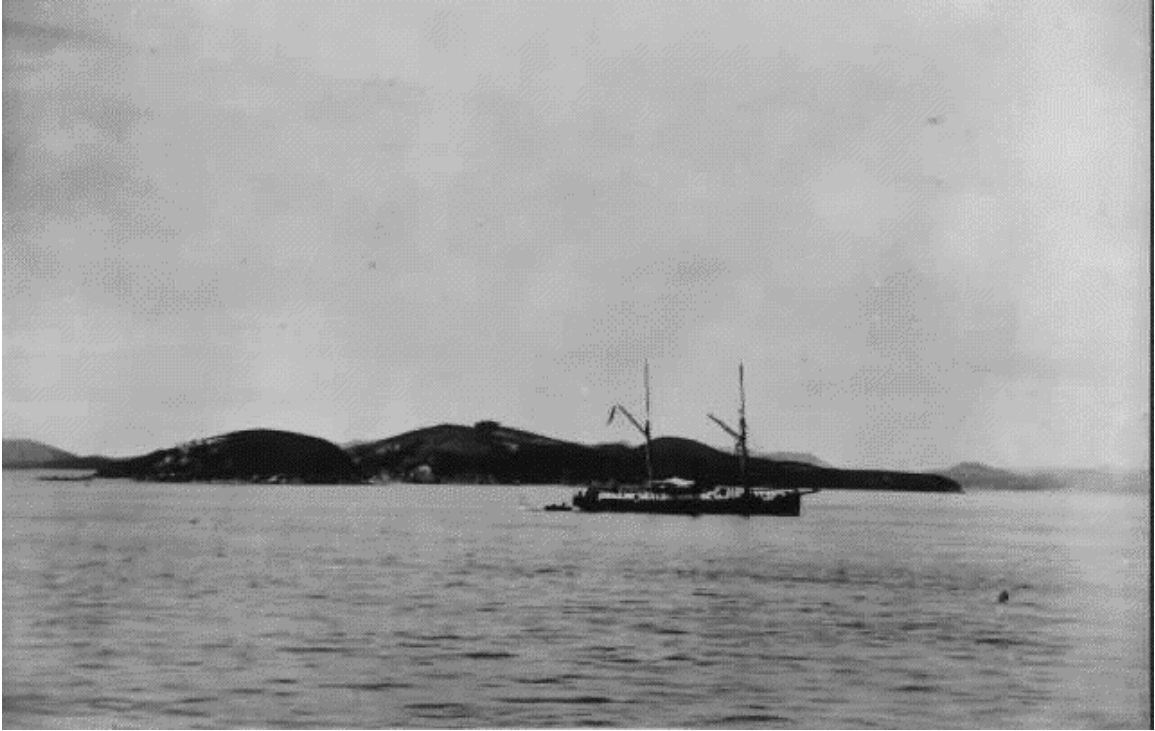


The USS Alaska. National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-33.





The USS Benicia. National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-34.



The USS Palos. National Archives and Records Administration. Variant Control Number: NWDNS-200-KWG-35.



An aerial view of the battle area. Note the hook in the river near the top right of the photo. Picture taken 29 April 1954. Marine Corps Photo A366075.



Rear Admiral John Rodgers (second from right) and other officers conferring on war plans prior to the battle. The other officers are (left to right) Lt. Wm. K. Wheeler, Flag LT. CDR. Fisher, Secretary, CDR Edward T. Nichols, Chief of Staff, CDR H.C. Blake, C/O USS Alaska, Capt. George H. Cooper, C/O, USS Colorado, CDR L.A. Kimberly, C/O USS Benicia, CDR Edward P. McCrea, C/O USS Monocacy, and Master John E. Pillsbury, of the USS Colorado. Official US Navy Photo NH66308.



William F. Lukes, Landsman USN. Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for action against the Koreans during the capture of the Han river forts, June 1871. Copied from "The Deeds of Valor," VOL II, p. 91, published by the Perrien-Keydel Co., Detroit Michigan, 1907. Picture courtesy of US Navy Historical Center.



Lieutenant Hugh H. McKee. Mortally wounded in action, June 11<sup>th</sup> 1871. Fort McKee was later named for him. US Navy photograph NH66327.



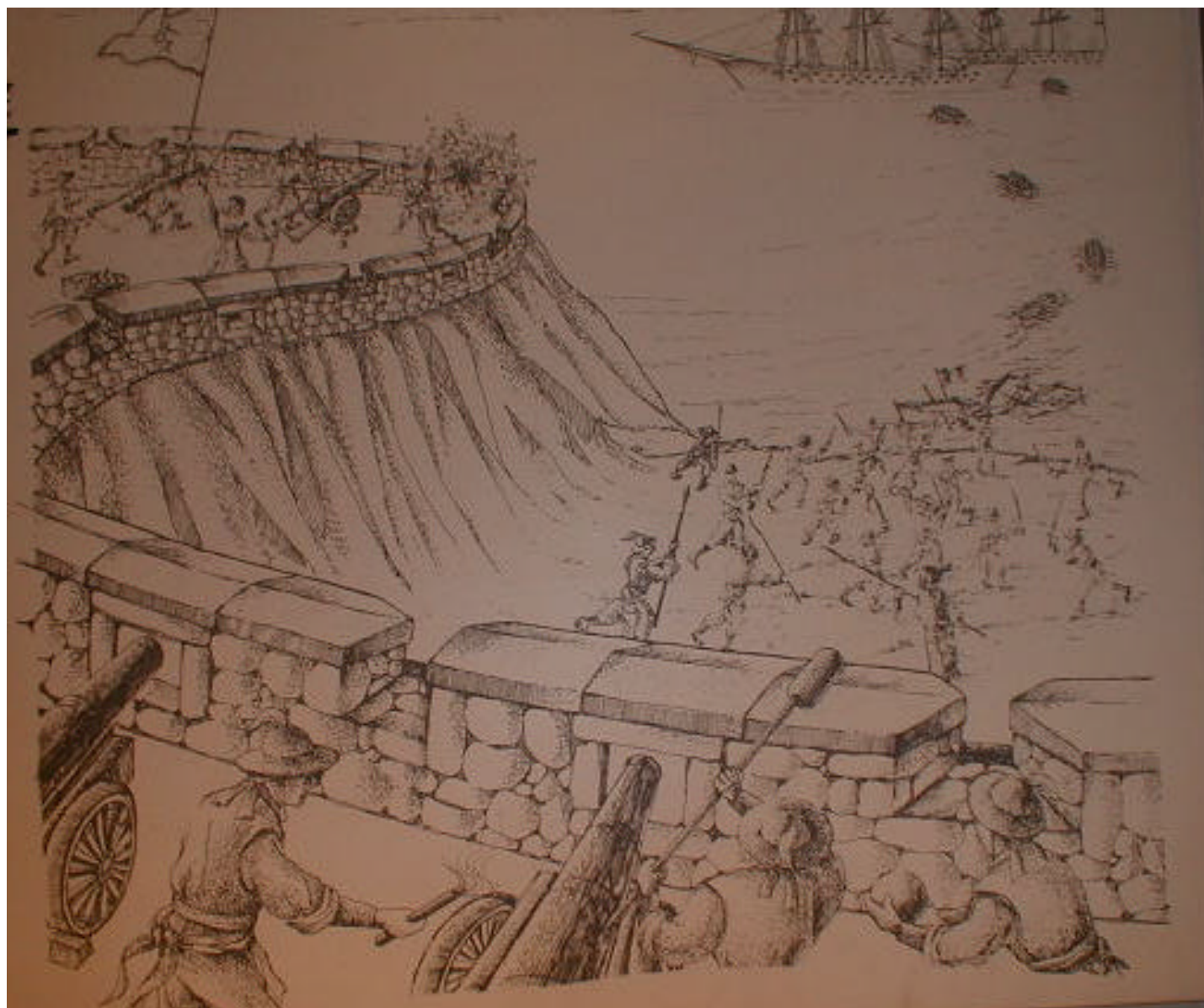


### US ARTIST'S CONCEPTION

**J. CLYMER'S (USMCR) CONCEPTION OF THE JUNE 10, 1871 LANDING BY US NAVY AND MARINE FORCES AT THE CHOJI FORTRESS, KANGHWA ISLAND, KOREA. COVER OF NOVEMBER 1944 ISSUE OF MARINE CORPS GAZETTE.**

2

Next Picture: Korean artist's conception of the same landing. See following page.  
Picture hangs in Kang Hwa Do Museum. Photograph of picture courtesy of Mr. Robert Collins.





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Tilton, McClane, Capt USMC. Personal Letter No. 14. Dated: June 21<sup>st</sup> 1871. From the Personal papers of McClane Tilton, held at Marine Corps University Archives, Marine Corps Research Center, Quantico Va.

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Still Picture Branch. Collection series KWG. Items 01-50 Variant Control Numbers:  
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U.S. Navy. Official U.S. Navy and Marine Corps Photographs, Variant Numbers:  
NH 66327, 66308, 79941, 63672, and USMC A366075. Naval Historical Center.  
Naval Historical Center Photographic Section, Washington Navy Yard, Washington,  
DC.